

To Isaac jy Israeli.

ATHENS,

Nov. 30.

On the afternoon of our arrival in Piraeus, which is about five miles from the city, I climbed a small hill, forming the side of the harbour. From it I looked upon an immense plain covered with olive woods and skirted by mountains. Some isolated hills rise at a distance from the bounding ridge. On one of these I gazed upon a magnificent temple, bathed in the sunset; at the foot of the hill was a walled city of considerable dimensions, in front of which a Doric temple apparently quite perfect. The violet sunset — and to-day the tint was peculiarly vivid — threw over this scene a colouring becoming its beauty, and if possible increasing its delicate character. The city was Athens; but independent of all reminiscences, I never witnessed anything so truly beautiful, and I have seen a great deal.

We were fortunate. The Acropolis, which has been shut for nine years, was open to us, the first Englishmen. Athens is still in the power of the Turks, but the Grecian Commission to receive it arrived a short time before us. When we entered the city, we found every house roofless; but really, before the war, modern Athens must have been no common town. The ancient remains have been respected; the Parthenon, and the other temples which are in the Acropolis, have necessarily suffered during the siege, but the injury is only in the detail; the general effect is not marred. We saw hundreds of shells and balls lying about the ruins. The temple of Theseus looks at a short distance as if it were just finished by Pericles.¹

'Of all that I have yet visited,' lie wrote to Mrs. Austen, 'nothing has more completely realized all that I imagined and all that I could have wished than Athens.' In spite, however, of this momentary enthusiasm there was not much real sympathy between Disraeli's genius and the pure Hellenic spirit, and education had done little to foster any that nature had implanted in him. 'Pleasant Argos and rich Mycenae, the tomb of Agamemnon and the palace of Clytemnestra,' inspired in Contarini Fleming thoughts that were not unworthy of the scene: —

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49. In *Contarini Fleming* he corrected Cimon. 'Pericles' into